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EFFECTS OF EXPLICIT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION ON READING COMPREHENSION

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In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Abstract

This action research paper examines the relationship between explicit vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension, specifically with English Language Learners (ELL). The research took place in a second and fourth grade classroom in the same school in central Minnesota. Students took pretests and posttests for grade level comprehension and vocabulary assessments. Students would then receive explicit vocabulary instruction throughout the week. Finally, students would complete the same assessments as were completed at the beginning of the study. Student surveys were also used to measure confidence and motivation. Data was collected in the form of pretest and posttest scores for grade level comprehension and vocabulary assessments, student surveys, and Fountas and Pinnell assessments. Study results suggest that explicit vocabulary instruction does have an effect on reading comprehension and that ELLs showed a greater degree of growth than non-ELLs. However, more research needs to be conducted to verify that the results were because of vocabulary instruction rather than students making gains from other reading areas. After completing this research, a next possible step would be to continue collecting data to increase the sample size. Another step would be to create a control group and only use explicit vocabulary instruction with some of the students and then compare data from both groups.

Keywords: vocabulary, comprehension, reading, ELL

There are a growing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in today's classrooms. ELL's may lack the prior knowledge compared to their non-ELL peers have. Whether it is cultural or personal experience, these students may struggle with understanding content due to their lack of prior knowledge. . Not having the language exposure at home can set them back in their English language skills, which impacts their learning at school--in particular, their minimal exposure to academic vocabulary in English . While reading, students encounter hundreds or even thousands of words a day. Without the background knowledge or the basic understanding of most of the words, comprehension takes a huge hit in the students' reading.

We wanted to do this research because this topic is very relevant for our own school. Our school's population is 30 percent Hispanic. We wanted to find a topic that we were interested in and able to help improve our own teaching. As teachers, we are constantly evolving and adapting to improve our instruction. By looking into whether explicit vocabulary instruction can improve reading comprehension, we hoped to find strategies that can help our reading instruction for all students.

Data for this research was collected in a second and fourth-grade classroom in a rural community in the Midwest region of the United States during the 2016/2017 school year. The elementary school is primarily made up of Caucasian and Hispanic students. As stated above, 30 percent of the student population is Hispanic. Sixty-nine percent of the students are Caucasian. The second-grade class had 25 students in the class; six of whom are ELLs. The fourth-grade class had 29 students, nine of whom are ELLs. The ELLs in this school take the ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State) assessment each year to determine their level in regards to fluency in English. The students who have not passed the

ACCESS assessment are the students who receive instruction from the ELL teacher on a daily basis. The purpose of this study was to become closer to answering the question: *How does explicit vocabulary instruction prior to reading a text impact reading comprehension for ELLs in second and fourth grade?*

Literature Review

The literacy components in reading are phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Tindall and Nisbet, 2010, p. 2). According to Barr, Eslami, and Joshi (2012) and August, McCardle, and Shanahan (2014), elementary students who are ELLs benefit from explicit instruction in the five components of literacy. August et. al (2014) refer to the report given by the National Reading Panel (NRP) regarding their reading research with both non-ELLs and ELLs. ELLs benefit from explicit instruction in decoding, or phonics and phonemic awareness when they learn that the letter sounds differ from their native language (August et. al, 2014). Also, by applying the sounds and letters of the ELL's native language, teachers can help connect their prior knowledge to the English language (Barr et. al, 2012).

Nisbet and Tindall emphasize that fluency is an important component to literacy and reading comprehension for ELLs (Nibset and Tindall, 2010). Fluency can be taught most effectively in small groups or one-on-one in an explicit manner (Nibset and Tindall, 2010). NRP also found that repeated reading and explicitly taught decoding skills are beneficial for ELLs (August et. al 2014).

Vocabulary is a crucial component of literacy because it gives meanings to words the students read (August et. al, 2014). August et. al (2014), Nisbet and Tindall (2010), and Barr et. al (2012) all state that vocabulary is a clear link to reading comprehension for students, especially the ELL population. A way for teachers to promote vocabulary growth is to connect

the English language to the students' native language (Nisbet and Tindall, 2010). Teachers can also teach prefixes, suffixes, and other parts of the word to help students with vocabulary strategies as they read and listen to others (August et. al, 2014).

The fifth component is comprehension. According to August et. al (2014), comprehension relies on decoding, vocabulary knowledge, and at times, listening comprehension. The NRP found that students benefit from explicit instruction on how to use multiple comprehension strategies at a time (August et. al, 2014). Students can better comprehend by using skills and strategies such as summarizing, questioning, monitoring, and visualizing (August et. al, 2014).

A comprehension strategy brought up in several studies for building comprehension with ELLs is linking students' personal connections while building prior knowledge before, during, and after the reading takes place (August et. al, 2014; Nisbet & Tindall, 2010; Barr et. al, 2012; Brown & Broemmel, 2011). Using prior knowledge and personal connections provide meaning for the student and is the link between the words and fully comprehending the text (August et. al, 2014). Teachers can do this by creating background knowledge with vocabulary by providing exposure to words presented in the text (2014). Brown and Broemmel (2011) emphasize the importance of bringing in students' cultural background by incorporating texts that relate to their cultural upbringing. This can serve as an approach to making connections to the text (Brown and Broemmel, 2011).

When a student can identify the main idea, she or he can understand the most important message in a reading (Boushey & Moser, 2009). When looking to find the main idea, she or he should be looking at details that were crucial to the story, rather than small, insignificant details (Boushey & Moser, 2009). Because of this, identifying the main idea is a prerequisite skill for

being able to summarize the story (Boushey & Moser, 2009). Identifying the main idea can be the difference between a good and poor reader (Wang, 2009). However, just because a student can understand the essential idea of a paragraph does not mean that he or she understands the entire book (Wang, 2009). Identifying the main idea is an important part of the reading comprehension process, especially for struggling readers (Wang, 2009).

Summarizing is a different skill than retelling a story. Retelling a story is using the author's words and putting them in order, whereas summarizing is the student taking their words and explaining what the story was about (Remarkable retellings, Super Summaries, 2010). When students orally share their summary of the story, they are going to be more likely to monitor their reading and, therefore, increase comprehension (2010). Students are more likely to comprehend their story if they can summarize correctly (Littlefield, 2011). By being able to verbalize or write down the main events of the story in chronological order, students will exhibit a much better understanding of the book that they are reading (Littlefield, 2011).

"The SIOP Model is an instructional framework for organizing classroom instruction in meaningful and effective ways" for ELL students (Echevarria, 2010, p. 8). Teachers that implement the SIOP model into their classroom are also helping the rest of their students (Echevarria, 2010). The SIOP model also uses Response to Intervention (RTI) to determine gaps for all students (Pascopella, 2011). Teachers that can make modifications to individualize instruction are going to help the growth of all students, especially ELLs (Echevarria, 2010). For ELLs to make academic progress, they need to be highly engaged for 90-100 percent of the time (Echevarria, 2010). According to Echevarria (2010), there are six principles of instruction when it comes to teaching and increasing engagement for ELLs. They are:

- providing many opportunities for English learners to develop oral competency

- link ELLs background knowledge to the content being taught
- provide explicit vocabulary instruction to ELLs
- creating lessons that are meaningful and accessible
- stimulate ELLs thinking and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate learning
- assess ELLs frequently and plan purposefully based on that data (Echevarria, 2010).

With ELL students not being exposed to the English language as much as other students, these strategies will help make up for that lost time and help them show reading growth in the classroom (2010).

When reading, ELL students should be looking for books that are of interest to them and at their instructional reading level (Tindall, 2010). The Daily 5/CAFE program explains that students should be reading books that are appropriate for their reading level (Boushey & Mosey, 2009). Good fit books are books that are at a student's reading level, of interest to them, and allow the students to read the words at a 95 percent accuracy (Boushey & Mosey, 2009). By having the students choose books that are of interest to them, this will help students become motivated to read and also help keep students engaged at least 90 percent of the time, as suggested is required for their advancement (2009).

Providing students with opportunities to read books that are at their reading level is a form of differentiation (Boushey and Moser, 2009). Differentiation is a major component in successful ELL classrooms (Tindall and Nisbet, 2010). Although there has not been research done on a whole class or school level to demonstrate the exact way to differentiate, it is evident that differentiating will help students (August et. al, 2014). According to August et. al (2014), the

most effective strategy to demonstrate differentiation with ELLs is to connect the relationship between the two languages, in order to connect to the student's prior knowledge so as to make sense of English (August et al, 2014). There are also attributes that teachers should know about their students. Looking at the student's home language and whether or not they were born in the United States is crucial because it may help show different programs that may be successful for ELLs (Irwin, Parker, & O'Dwyer, 2014). It is important for teachers to find out students' language skills and levels so they can use teaching approaches based on their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English to help students grow in all areas (August et. al, 2014).

Discussion

This review of the literature explored several outlets that have gone in depth with what ELLs need to read and comprehend successfully. Throughout the research, there has not been one specific plan that has guaranteed to be fully effective for struggling readers, such as ELLs. However, numerous sources validate the efficacy of using strategies such as: activating prior knowledge and building background knowledge; identifying the main idea and fluency; utilizing the SIOP model; and differentiated instruction are all ways that will help ELLs to succeed.

Intervention

This action research study began the last week of January and continued for eight weeks. Action research is an investigation trying to find a solution to a problem that people face on an everyday basis (Hendricks, 2012). Our project is considered an action research because we are looking for solutions to help us improve our reading instruction for ELLs and non-ELLs. Second and fourth grade students participated. While all students were included in the intervention, we

analyzed our findings to determine if the impact, in particular, had any benefits for our ELL students.

The following data sources were used to measure our data: pre and post Fountas and Pinnell assessments for reading levels; weekly pre- and post- tests assessing vocabulary and reading comprehension; a pre-post survey of attitudes towards reading; and, regular self-reflection and dialogue by the researchers around the intervention.

Fountas and Pinnell

Fountas and Pinnell is an assessment that determines a child's reading level and was delivered at the beginning and end of the eight-week research (Appendix A). We have been trained in administering this assessment through staff development at our school. Our school uses Fountas and Pinnell so the entire school district is using the same language and assessment when finding a student's reading level. Our school district requires that we assess our students twice in one school year. The scale is on an A-Z grading standard and is used in Kindergarten through eighth grade (Appendix B). For the assessment, we listened to each child as he or she read fiction or non-fiction text. While the student read, we marked down any mistakes and self-corrects. Once the child was done reading, we asked comprehension questions. After completing one book and the questions, we used the Fountas and Pinnell guidelines to determine if that book was the appropriate reading level or if he or should move onto the next book. The same process was completed until the child was at the correct reading level.

We used this assessment to look at students' reading levels and to see if their comprehension improved over this eight-week span. Fountas and Pinnell also showed us where our students are in regards to being at grade level.

Vocabulary Test: Pretest

First, students completed a vocabulary test (Appendix C). We chose four to six vocabulary words a week that were used within the comprehension passage. This test assessed their knowledge of each word. The words were carefully selected. We chose words that would help influence the understanding of the passage and the questions, as well as words students may be unfamiliar with. Students completed a vocabulary test on the first day of the school week, after finishing the comprehension passage. This assessment helped us understand students' prior knowledge of the selected words. The test was corrected and recorded. Once again, teachers provided no instruction before the students completed the assessment.

Vocabulary Instruction

After the pretests on Monday or the first day of the school week, we delivered lessons that helped students understand the meaning of the words chosen for the week. Through explicit instruction, graphic organizers, drama, creating visuals, writing words in sentences, and brainstorming similar examples and synonyms, students learned and incorporated the words into conversations three days a week (typically Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday). These strategies were done using whole group and small group instruction.

On the first day of vocabulary instruction, the words were introduced explicitly on chart paper where the definition and picture were provided. Second graders learned two to three words at a time; fourth graders learned four to six words at a time. On the same day, we provided real-life examples as well as examples of books or sentences we created. Embedded within these lessons, we made sure to scaffold student understanding of how to predict the meaning of words by looking at the context of the sentence. While reading independently, students would locate and mark in their books if they found the different vocabulary words for that week. This activity was on-going throughout the week.

The second day of instruction, fourth-grade students completed graphic organizers to help embed the definitions through writing. These graphic organizers included: writing the definition, drawing a picture, writing a synonym, and writing a sentence. These were kept in vocabulary notebooks students held in their book bin. For the second graders, the second day of instruction was used to learn the next two words as well as review the first two words.

The third day was used as a review day, or a day to reteach any words that students seem to struggle with. We made sure we had time to review all of the words at once. Students played matching games with synonyms and antonyms as well as playing charades (partner and whole-group). They also practiced using the words in sentences through writing and speaking. We used informal assessments through observation to gauge whether or not students needed additional explicit instruction or if they were ready to work independently using the words. We spent, on average, around 45 minutes a week working with students on vocabulary building activities.

Comprehension Passage: Pretest

Student's comprehension was measured based on grade level comprehension passages (Appendix D). Each week had a different passage that used one of the various reading skills: prediction, the sequence of events, main idea and details, etc. All students completed a comprehension passage on the first day of the school week. There were four questions students were to answer after reading the passage. These passages were corrected and recorded. Teachers did not provide any instruction before the students completed the assessment.

ELL Initial Student Survey

We also surveyed the ELL students to gauge their confidence and motivation in reading. This survey was done on the first day of the week after taking the comprehension passage and vocabulary test. Each student answered questions while meeting individually with the teacher

(Appendix E). The students were met with individually to complete the surveys. By meeting individually with the students, we felt that clarifying questions could be answered and that a conversation could be had with the students rather than the students aimlessly filling in the worksheet.

Comprehension Passage: Posttest

On Friday or the last day of the week, all students completed the same grade-level comprehension passage they did on Monday. The instructions we gave before the comprehension passage were delivered exactly how they were on Monday, to maintain consistency. Students read the passage and answered the four questions. The assessment was corrected and recorded.

Vocabulary Test: Posttest

On the same day as the comprehension check, students completed the same vocabulary test as they did on Monday. Once again, the instructions were delivered exactly how they were earlier in the week. These tests were corrected and recorded.

ELL Final Student Survey

All ELL students completed a posttest survey that asked the same questions as they did on Monday. This test was to measure their confidence, interest, and motivation to read after learning the words throughout the week. Similar to before, participants were surveyed in a conversation with the same survey as before. These surveys were collected, then compared to the survey from Monday, or the first day of the week.

Analysis of Data

This action research considers the impact that a focus on vocabulary exposure has on the ability for students to comprehend grade level material and to see if there is a correlation between direct vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension, with particular attention to the

outcomes of ELL students. To analyze whether or not there was a correlation between reading comprehension and explicit vocabulary instruction, we used four data collection tools: Fountas and Pinnell assessments, grade level assessments, student surveys, and vocabulary assessments. We analyzed data gathered on ELL and non-ELL students separately, and then we compared the data from the two groups to see if there were any differences in effectiveness or outcomes. At the beginning of the eight-week window, we tested our students using the Fountas and Pinnell assessment tool (Appendix A). This helped us find students' current reading level. The test was completed again after the eight weeks. We used this to see the overall reading growth for each student.

The second-grade benchmark level for winter is level K, and the benchmark level for the spring is level M. These benchmarks are determined by our school but influenced by the Fountas and Pinnell guidelines. Figure 1 shows that 13 students were below grade level in the winter, six of these students are ELL. In the spring, 12 students were below grade-level, and again, six were ELL. Although there was an improvement with all ELL students, none of these students met grade level by the spring. The data displayed in figure 1 shows the gains made by students in second grade from the beginning to the end of the research period; while the data displayed in figure 2 shows the winter to spring gains in fourth grade. Students highlighted in yellow are ELL students, and those highlighted in orange are below grade-level .

Fountas and Pinnell Assessments 2nd Grade			
Students	Winter	Spring	Total Growth
1	L	O	3
2	J	N	4
3	N	P	2
4	S	T	1
5	H	K	3
6	H	J	2
7	G	L	3
8	N	O	1
9	P	S	1
10	C	D	1
11	I	L	3
12	G	K	4
13	E	G	2
14	N	T	6
15	N	O	1
16	H	J	2
17	L	M	1
18	C	E	2
19	P	S	3
20	N	O	1
21	O	O	0
22	I	L	2
23	Q	T	3
24	J	L	2
25	F	J	4

Figure 1: Fountas and Pinnell Assessment (Second Grade Data)

By the end of fourth grade, students should be either at a benchmark level Q or a level R. Once again, these benchmarks are determined by our school but influenced by the Fountas and Pinnell program. Figure two shows that fifteen students were below grade level, four of those students are ELL. In the spring, nine students were below grade level, with three of whom are ELL. This means that there was one ELL student who went from below grade level to at grade level from winter to the spring benchmarks. From the winter to the spring, each ELL went up at least one level benchmark. One ELL student went up three benchmark levels, five ELLs went up two levels, and three ELLs went up one level.

**Fountas and Pinnell Assessments
4th Grade**

Students	Winter	Spring	Total Growth
1	Q	R	1
2	Q	S	2
3	P	Q	1
4	E	H	3
5	S	U	2
6	O	P	1
7	P	Q	1
8	R	T	2
9	Q	S	2
10	M	O	2
11	Q	S	2
12	M	M	0
13	R	S	1
14	R	S	1
15	P	Q	1
16	R	T	2
17	P	Q	1
18	N	P	2
19	N	O	1
20	O	P	1
21	O	Q	2
22	I	L	3
23	W	Y	2
24	M	O	2
25	P	Q	1
26	Q	T	3
27	S	U	2
28	Q	S	2
29	P	Q	1

Figure 2: Fountas and Pinnell Assessment (Fourth Grade Data)

At the beginning of each week, students completed a reading assessment to measure their comprehension (Appendix D). This four-point assessment was used as a pretest to check their comprehension before any vocabulary instruction. After a week's worth of explicit vocabulary instruction, students took the same test on the last day of the week. Figure 3 demonstrates the pretest and posttest comparisons for the non-ELL second graders and figure 4 displays the same data for ELL second graders.

The scores indicated in the graph are student averages for each week. Students consistently improved in the posttest after the vocabulary instruction. The overall eight-week average score for non-ELL students on the pretest is 2.97, and the average posttest score is 3.42

points, which is a 0.45 point difference between the two tests. For ELL students, the average pretest score is 2.37 points, and the average posttest is 3.24 points; a 0.87 point difference. Although ELL students scored lower than non-ELL, their growth over the week was nearly twice that of the non-ELL students..

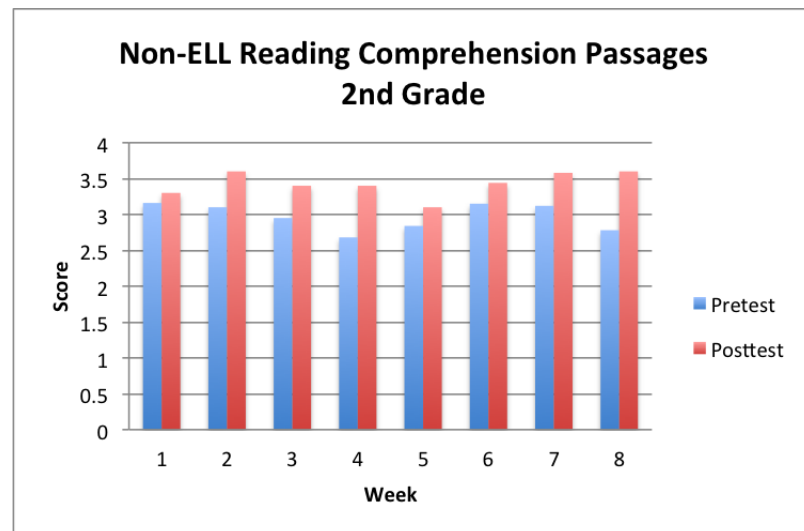


Figure 3: Non-ELL Reading Results – 2nd Grade

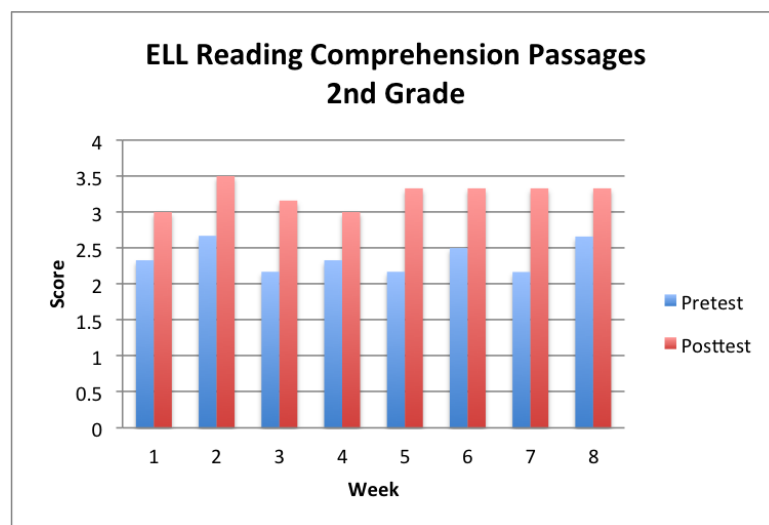


Figure 4: ELL Reading Results – 2nd Grade

Fourth grade had similar results. Figures five and six displays the results for fourth grade in their reading passages. The posttest score for each week was consistently higher than the

pretest. For non-ELLs, the difference between pretest and posttest is 0.6 of a point. For ELL's, the average pretest score is 1.51 points, and the average posttest score is 2.52 points, a 1.01 point difference. Similar to second graders, although fourth grade ELL's scored lower than non-ELL, they improved .41 more than the non-ELLs.

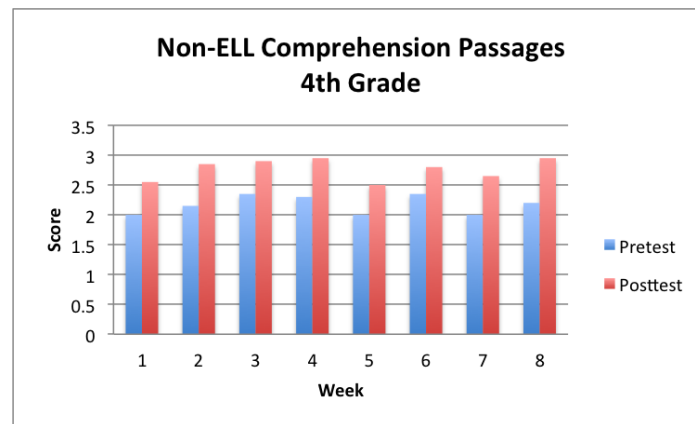


Figure 5: Non-ELL Reading Results - 4th Grade

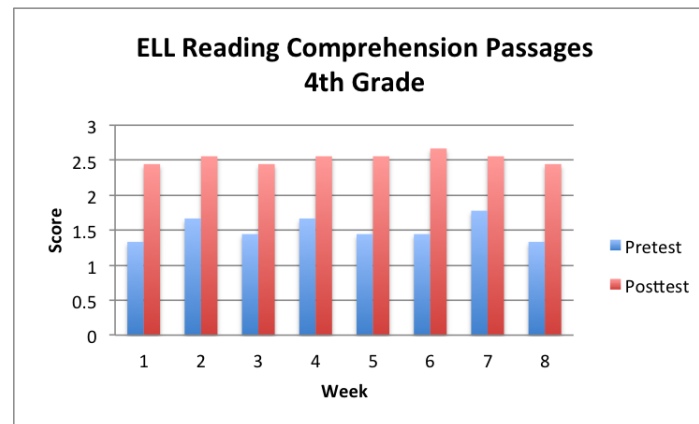


Figure 6: ELL Reading Results - 4th Grade

Students also completed a vocabulary test to assess their knowledge of the vocabulary words before and after the week's worth of instruction (Appendix C). The words were carefully chosen based on the content of the passage. Similar to the reading assessment, students completed a pretest and a posttest to measure their vocabulary growth after receiving explicit

instruction. Figures seven and eight display the results of the weekly average pretest and posttest scores for second-grade non-ELL students (see Figure 7) and ELL students (see Figure 8).

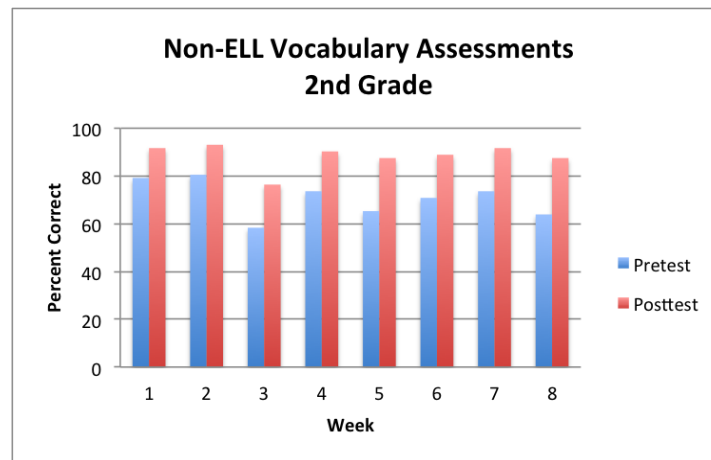


Figure 7: Non-ELL Vocabulary Results - 2nd Grade

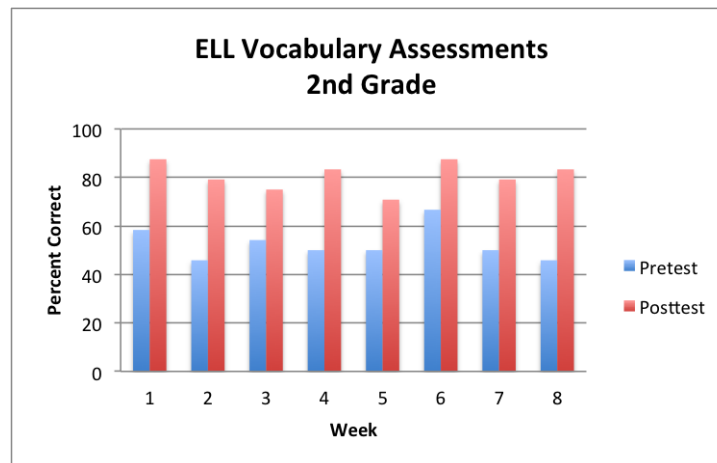


Figure 8: ELL Vocabulary Results - 2nd Grade

The vocabulary results in second grade demonstrate growth from pretest to posttest for both non-ELL and ELL students. For non-ELL students, the eight-week average for the pretest is about 70.7 percent; the posttest average is 88.37 percent. This means after vocabulary instruction throughout the week, non-ELL students improved about 17.67 percent. We saw similar results with ELL students in second grade. Students earned, on average, about 52.6 percent with their

pretest and about 80.73 percent on their posttest. With a 28.13 percent difference, we found that vocabulary instruction made an impact on their vocabulary understanding.

In fourth grade, students showed improvement from the pretest to the posttest for both ELLs and non-ELLs. The average percentage correct for non-ELLs on the pretest was 40.32 percent. On the posttest, the average percentage correct for non-ELLs was 75.20. This is an increase of 34.88 percent from the beginning of the week to the end of the week. ELLs earned, on average, a 22.46 percent on the vocabulary pretest. On the posttest, the same students earned an average of 69.46 percent. This is an increase of 47 percent.

Our data support several important hypothesis: One, the pretest scores for our ELLs demonstrate that vocabulary was a major issue for the fourth-grade class participants. Two, it showed that explicit vocabulary instruction would help students learn the vocabulary words throughout the week and help increase comprehension scores as a result.

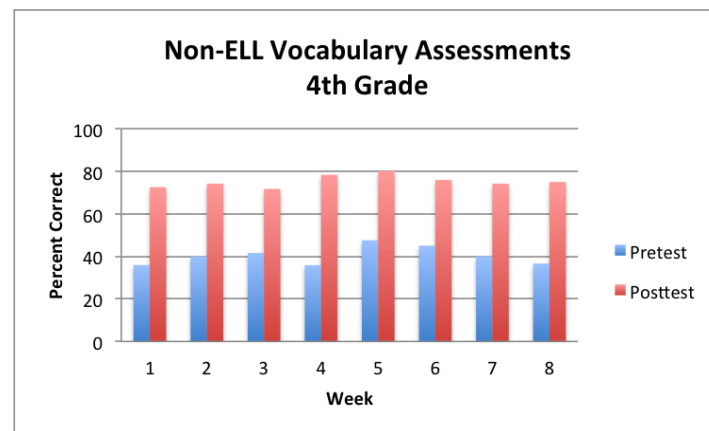


Figure 9: Non-ELL Vocabulary Results - 4th Grade

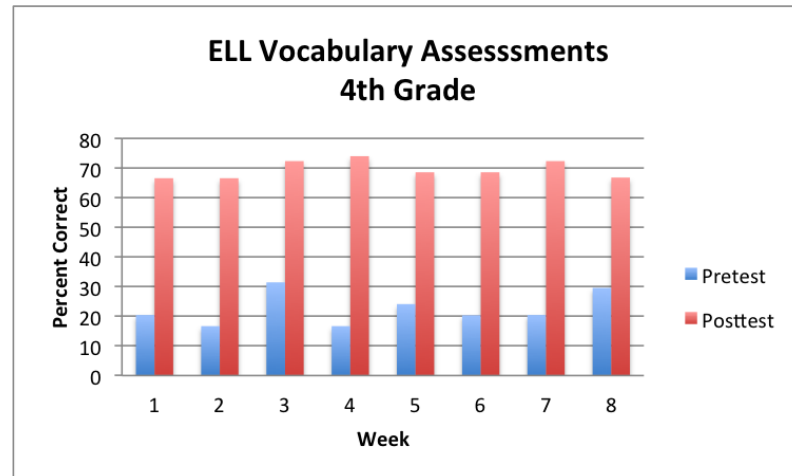


Figure 10: ELL Vocabulary Results - 4th Grade

In addition to the comprehension and vocabulary assessment, ELL students completed a survey in an interview format with each teacher (Appendix E). We asked four questions, and students answered on a scale of one through three. Questions one and two centered around confidence, while questions three and four focused on motivation and the child's interest in reading. Figure 11 displays the results of the second-grade survey, comparing Monday to Friday; figure 12 shows the same thing for fourth grade.

In second grade, we found that on average, students scored higher on all questions on the posttest than the pretest. Although the margins are smaller than the vocabulary and comprehension assessments, there is a difference between the days. We found that questions one and two, the questions that measured confidence, had the biggest difference of 0.44 points between Monday and Friday. Therefore, their confidence of being able to read and understand the passage increased from Monday to Friday after a week's worth of instruction in vocabulary. Questions three and four center around student interest in reading. These questions also increased from Monday to Friday, however, by a smaller margin of 0.22 points (question 3) and 0.26 points (question 4).

With fourth graders, the data was very similar. Students' confidence improved from the pretest to the posttest. On question one, students' scores improved, on average, by .29 points (see Figure 13). When answering question two, students' scores improved by .32 points. This shows that students were much more confident when completing the assessment on Friday compared to Monday. The motivation questions also increased from the beginning of the week to the end of the week. Question three showed that students' scores improved by .30 points, on average. The fourth question had students' average scores improve by .30 as well. These two scores show that all students were more motivated to complete the assignment on Friday than they were on Monday.

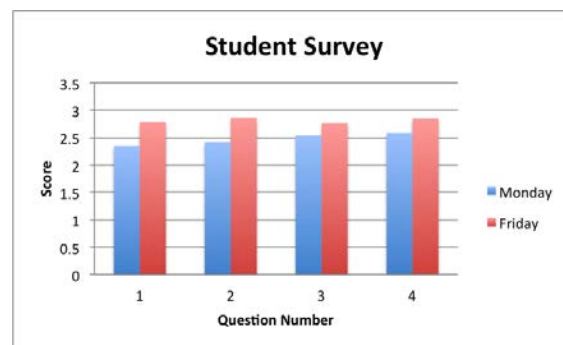


Figure 11: 2nd Grade Student Survey Results

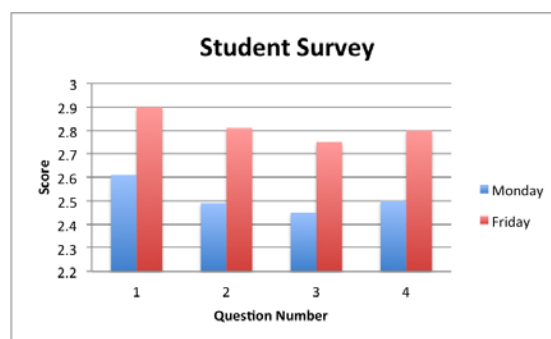


Figure 12: 4th Grade Student Survey Results

When working with our students, we also made observations that we wrote down in our personal pensieve. Our pensieve is an item used to store information and observations about

each specific student in our class. When working with our students, our ELLs needed more reinforcement while working with the vocabulary words. Multiple times, we both wrote that we had to reteach the vocabulary words to our ELLs. The second grade participants often told us that they had never heard the vocabulary words spoken until they were brought up in the comprehension assessment. However, by the end of each week, students were able to recognize the vocabulary words and were able to do the different vocabulary activities that were done through the vocabulary instruction.

Our data sources gave us a lot of crucial information. Each data source gave us an indication that explicit vocabulary instruction does improve reading comprehension. When looking at grade level comprehension passages, students' scores increased significantly from the pretest to the posttest for both second and fourth graders. Fourth grade ELLs improved their score more drastically than non-ELLs did. Looking at the scores, our ELLs had a lower score initially on their vocabulary assessment. This showed us that our ELLs have a lower vocabulary than our non-ELLs and could use additional help in this area. By teaching students vocabulary words, their confidence improved and they were more motivated to complete the assessments. It also shows that reading comprehension became easier for our ELLs by learning new vocabulary words.

Our Fountas and Pinnell scores also improved from the winter to the spring. Each fourth-grade student improved their Fountas and Pinnell score at least one level. Almost all second graders improved their score as well, except a few who stayed at the level they were in the winter; however, those students were already well above grade-level. When looking at the fourth-grade data, a significant item was that one ELL jumped from being below grade level to

be at grade level. In the second grade group of students, there were no ELL students who went from below grade level to at or above grade level.

Although there were improvements in reading scores, it is tough to say whether or not explicit vocabulary instruction is the reason that students' scores improved. There are more factors than just comprehension that play a role in conducting the Fountas and Pinnell grading. Accuracy and fluency are also considered while finding each student's' reading level. All of our students became better readers, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it is because of the vocabulary instruction.

When looking at the vocabulary assessments, students made great gains from the beginning of the week to the end of the week. These assessments showed that the explicit instruction helped students improve their vocabulary. Second grade had low initial scores. However, fourth grade scored much lower in their initial scores, which did show that vocabulary needed to be a point of emphasis. When seeing the posttest results, it was important to see the improvement from the beginning of the week.

Finally, student surveys demonstrated whether students' motivation and confidence improved when reading grade level material. In both second and fourth grade, the students were more confident and motivated at the end of the week compared to the beginning of the week. Although the margins were smaller than the other data sources, that area still made gains regardless. This proved that our vocabulary instruction made a big difference in this area. Students felt more comfortable and confident by learning the vocabulary words throughout the week.

Although our data proves that vocabulary instruction helps student comprehension, there are other factors to consider while interpreting this data. One factor is that students were exposed

to the passage on Monday and reintroduced on Friday. They seemed more comfortable when completing the assessment on Friday than they did on Monday. This familiarity could have helped their esteem, which could have helped the students' scores improve.

Overall, we believe that student comprehension was impacted by the acquisition of different vocabulary words. Each data source improved as the week went along. Students felt more confident, motivated, and achieved better results on Friday than they did on Monday. This has led us to believe that explicit vocabulary instruction drastically helps improve reading comprehension.

Action Plan

The purpose of this study was to see if there is a direct correlation between explicit vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension. The information that we found, as well as our own teaching experiences, told us that vocabulary is needed to be able to comprehend whatever is being read. We expected that the information from our research would show us that there would be a correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Looking at our data analysis, it is clear that students made gains from pretest to posttest with the comprehension and vocabulary assessment. We were happy that the students demonstrated growth from the beginning of the week to the end of the week. This proved that our instruction improved their vocabulary and comprehension. The student survey demonstrated the students' confidence and motivation regarding the comprehension assessment. For both second and fourth grade, the students felt more confident and motivated at the end of the week than the beginning of the week. This told us that students felt more confident and motivated after receiving a week's worth of instruction. Finally, our Fountas and Pinnell assessments showed that each student made gains from the beginning of the eight week research period to the

end of the research period. This was proof that the students' reading comprehension improved more significantly from the beginning to the end of the eight week period.

Although there were weekly and seasonal gains for most students in reading, we cannot make a definitive conclusion that explicit vocabulary instruction is the sole reason students' reading comprehension improved. Whether it was repetition in reading the passages or other factors, we don't feel that the data collected can prove that vocabulary instruction was the only contributing factor for comprehension improvement over the eight-week period. For example, another factor that could have influenced the students' scores of the comprehension passages is that the students had a pretest to familiarize themselves with the content, therefore, that exposure could have helped them improve their posttest score. The students' Fountas and Pinnell assessment could have improve due to their improvement in accuracy, or their comprehension could've improved, but it may not have been the vocabulary that influenced that improvement.

Going forward, we have found a few answers to help improve reading regardless of our result. First, students can always use vocabulary instruction. Looking closely at the vocabulary pretests, we found that students (especially our ELL) struggled with many words that would greatly impact their understanding of the text. After explicit vocabulary instruction, their vocabulary tests improved greatly. On average, fourth grade ELL students improved by 47 percent and second grade ELL students improved by about 28 percent.

Next, we can conclude that providing prior knowledge, by pre-teaching vocabulary, may result in more confidence and higher motivation. Our scores also indicate that ELLs were affected more from the vocabulary lessons than non-ELLs. The ELLs confidence and motivation scores in the student surveys had bigger increases than non-ELLs did. If students are confident and motivated, the likelihood of them improving and reading well increases.

Although we measured improvement in the students' reading comprehension, we believe this data would deem more accurate if there was a larger study group than our two classes of 25 and 29. Continuing this study with more students and possibly more grade levels may improve the data found in this research. Having a larger pool of students always helps the accuracy of the study. It would also be positive for us to look at a different group of students. By looking at a different class, we would be able to increase our sample size and also be able to look at different students than the ones that were in our class. It would also be interesting to look at different grade levels from the ones that we currently used. Would the data show the same results if we used a high school or middle school class? If we would do this action research for these classes, it would give us an answer of whether or not explicit vocabulary instruction impacts reading comprehension for all ages.

We also discussed if having a control group would help us distinguish if vocabulary was the reason why scores increased on Friday. For instance, "Group A" (non-ELLs and ELLs) would take a comprehension pretest and posttest with no vocabulary instruction throughout the week. "Group B" (non-ELLs and ELLs) would take the same tests, however, throughout the week they would receive explicit vocabulary instruction. By comparing the growth in each group, we would have a better idea if vocabulary instruction was the definitive reason why comprehension improved.

As we teach in our classrooms in the upcoming years, we hope to continue to teach vocabulary that is chosen purposefully with the text read for the day or week. It provides the students background knowledge, as well as confidence and motivation as they read the text. Even though we weren't able to make definitive conclusions with explicit vocabulary instruction, it is clear that students benefit from the increase of exposure to vocabulary words. Overall, we

plan on spending more time in the classroom next year teaching students a variety of vocabulary words and hoping to continue to watch closely

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Appendix A

Recording Forms

Recording Form

A Call for Change • LEVEL V • FICTION

Part Two: Comprehension Conversation

Have a conversation with the student, noting the key understandings the student expresses. Use prompts as needed to stimulate discussion of understandings the student does not express. It is not necessary to use every prompt for each book. Score for evidence of all understandings expressed—with or without a prompt. Circle the number in the score column that reflects the level of understanding demonstrated.

Teacher: Let's talk about what happened in this story.

Comprehension Scoring Key

0 Reflects **unsatisfactory** understanding of the text. Either does not respond or talks off the topic.

1 Reflects **limited** understanding of the text. Mentions a few facts or ideas but does not express the important information or ideas.

2 Reflects **satisfactory** understanding of the text. Includes important information and ideas but neglects other key understandings.

3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text. Includes almost all important information and main ideas.

Key Understandings	Prompts	Score
<p>Within the Text</p> <p>Tells 3–4 of Rachel's arguments, such as: Rachel complained about the lack of places for kids to do things; kids need to do things after school; kids are hanging around with nothing to do; the city should rehab the old middle school to make a recreation center; the city should have a youth board to work with the mayor; everyone should do the right thing.</p> <p><i>Note any additional understandings:</i></p>	<p>What were the important points Rachel made in her letter?</p> <p>What did she tell them to do? Be specific.</p>	0 1 2 3
<p>Beyond the Text</p> <p>Rachel doesn't believe in just complaining. She wants to do something about a problem. She's very good at arguing.</p> <p>It seems like the community is not doing enough to support kids.</p> <p>Rachel's ideas are good because (the center would serve everyone and solve the problem; kids would be more involved).</p> <p><i>Note any additional understandings:</i></p>	<p>Just from reading this letter, what kind of person do you think Rachel is?</p> <p>What do you think about the community she lives in?</p> <p>Do you think Rachel's ideas are good? Why (not)?</p>	0 1 2 3

Continued on next page.

116

Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2

Part Two: Comprehension Conversation *continued*

Key Understandings	Prompts	Score
About the Text The author used a lot of language that made Rachel seem strong. (Gives examples, such as: "serious thought," "disgruntled masses," "the future of your youth is in your hands.") Rachel wrote several arguments. Each was backed up by facts and details. She had an opening and a conclusion. <i>Note any additional understandings:</i>	How did the author, Sarah Wolbach, make Rachel sound like a strong person? Give some examples from Rachel's essay. Why was Rachel's essay effective?	0 1 2 3

Guide to Total Score

- 9-10 Excellent Comprehension
 7-8 Satisfactory Comprehension
 5-6 Limited Comprehension
 0-4 Unsatisfactory Comprehension

Subtotal Score: /9Add 1 for any additional understandings: /1Total Score: /10Part Three: Writing About Reading *(optional)*

Read the writing/drawing prompt below to the student. You can also cut the prompt on the dotted line and give it to the child. Specify the amount of time for the student to complete the task on a separate sheet of paper. (See Assessment Guide for more information.)

Writing About Reading

- 0 Reflects **no** understanding of the text.
 1 Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text.
 2 Reflects **partial** understanding of the text.
 3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text.

Write a letter to the editor about your reaction to Rachel's essay. Explain where you agree with her and where you disagree.

Appendix B

Fountas & Pinnell				
INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL EXPECTATIONS FOR READING				
	Beginning of Year (Aug.–Sept.)	1st Interval of Year (Nov.–Dec.)	2nd Interval of Year (Feb.–Mar.)	End of Year (May–June)
Grade K		C+	D+	E+
		B	C	D / E
		A	B	C
				Below C
Grade 1	E+	G+	I+	K+
	D / E	F	H	J / K
	C	E	G	I
	Below C	Below E	Below G	Below I
Grade 2	K+	L+	M+	N+
	J / K	K	L	M / N
	I	J	K	L
	Below I	Below J	Below K	Below L
Grade 3	N+	O+	P+	Q+
	M / N	N	O	P / Q
	L	M	N	O
	Below L	Below M	Below N	Below O
Grade 4	Q+	R+	S+	T+
	P / Q	Q	R	S / T
	O	P	Q	R
	Below O	Below P	Below Q	Below R
Grade 5	T+	U+	V+	W+
	S / T	T	U	V / W
	R	S	T	U
	Below R	Below S	Below T	Below U
Grade 6	W+	X+	Y+	Z
	V / W	W	X	Y
	U	V	W	X
	Below U	Below V	Below W	Below X
Grade 7	Z	Z	Z+	Z+
	Y	Y	Z	Z
	X	X	Y	Y
	Below X	Below X	Below Y	Below Y
Grade 8+	Z+	Z+	Z+	Z+
	Z	Z	Z	Z
	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Below Y	Below Y	Below Y	Below Y

KEY

Exceeds Expectations

Meets Expectations

Approaches Expectations:
Needs Short-Term Intervention

Does Not Meet Expectations:
Needs Intensive Intervention

The Instructional Level Expectations for Reading chart is intended to provide general guidelines for grade-level goals, which should be adjusted based on school/district requirements and professional teacher judgement.

Fountas and Pinnell Assessment Scale

Appendix C

Vocabulary Test
Week 1
_____ Pretest _____ Posttest

Read the words and definitions. Draw a line to match each word with the correct definition.

Kettle	A type of soup filled with vegetables and meat.
Stew	To never give up on something difficult.
Determination	To be trusted and people can depend on you.
Reliable	A pot to cook with

Appendix D

Pre and Post Comprehension Passage

Name: _____

Make Inferences

WEEK 27
DAY 3

READ THE PASSAGE

Use clues from the passage and your own knowledge about volcanoes to make inferences about what took place on Mount St. Helens.

Destruction and Recovery

The eruption of Mount St. Helens, a volcano in southwestern Washington, was the most destructive eruption in North America ever recorded. It happened on May 18, 1980. Inside the volcano, hot melted rock, or *magma*, had been rising toward the surface for weeks. This rock was under intense pressure. On the day of the eruption, an earthquake caused the north side of the mountain peak to collapse and slide into the valley. Without the weight of the mountaintop, the pressure inside the volcano was released. As a result, a huge explosion sent steam, dust, rock, and ash soaring into the sky.

In a matter of minutes, the landslide and explosion completely destroyed an area 12 miles long by 18 miles wide. Thousands of towering old trees were flattened and buried in hot dust, ash, and rock. Fifty-seven people were killed. No large animals close to the eruption survived. The only creatures that lived through the blast were those hidden in underground burrows. And hundreds of homes and miles of highway were destroyed.

Today, life is almost back to normal on Mount St. Helens. Even the areas that were most badly scorched and buried are now blanketed with wildflowers. Deer and elk are thriving. And millions of trees that people planted after the 1980 eruption are already growing tall. Scientists predict that 200 years from now, if the volcano has not erupted again by then, the area should have completely returned to the way it was.

SKILL PRACTICE Read each question. Fill in the bubble next to the correct answer.

1. Why do you think only the animals who lived underground survived the eruption?
☐ Ⓐ They were protected from the eruption.
☐ Ⓑ They were smarter than the other animals.
☐ Ⓒ They had prepared for the eruption.
☐ Ⓓ They lived farther away from the volcano.
2. How do you think scientists know it will take 200 years for Mount St. Helens to recover?
☐ Ⓐ They know how long plants take to grow.
☐ Ⓑ They know how long the recovery took last time.
☐ Ⓒ The people who live there told them.
☐ Ⓓ They can tell from the way the animals act.
3. What do you think the explosion was probably most similar to?
☐ Ⓐ a shaken bottle of soda exploding
☐ Ⓑ a rocket being launched into space
☐ Ⓒ a window shattering
☐ Ⓓ popcorn popping
4. Why do you think deer are thriving on Mount St. Helens today?
☐ Ⓐ because they survived the eruption
☐ Ⓑ because they can live underground
☐ Ⓒ because they have food to eat now
☐ Ⓓ because the animals that eat them died

STRATEGY PRACTICE How would you feel if you lived near Mount St. Helens today? Discuss it with a partner.

Appendix E

Second Grade Interview Pre-Vocabulary Instruction

Week: _____ Skill: _____ Name: _____

These questions are first prompted with students giving a rating of 1, 2 or 3, followed by a conversation to receive more information. These ratings have been used all year; therefore, students are familiar with the understanding of this rating.

Question	Rating	Conversation
Would you say that reading this passage was easy (3), it was a good fit (2), or hard (3)?		
How confident are you that you understood the passage? Very confident (3), confident (2), or not so confident (1)?		
If you had to choose today, would you say that reading is super fun, fun, or not fun. (1 – no, 2 – kind of, 3 – yes)		
Did you enjoy reading the passage? (1 – no, 2 – kind of, 3 – yes)		

Additional notes: